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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ACCRA 002548

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [CASC](#) [GH](#)

SUBJECT: POLICE EXCESSES IN CRACKDOWN AT KRISAN REFUGEE CAMP

REF: A) ABIDJAN 1694 B) ACCRA 2311

Classified By: REF COORD NATE BLUHM FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On December 8, RefCoords from Accra and Abidjan and AF/W Desk Officer for Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire visited Krisan refugee camp in Ghana's Western Region to investigate reports that police had beaten camp residents from November 8 - 11. Emboffs saw first-hand scars on the foreheads, backs, legs, and shoulders of refugees suggesting beatings, and confirmed with the head nurse that the camp clinic had treated 100 refugees for injuries following the police crackdown, which was in response to a refugee attack torching two buildings and one vehicle. The GOG has since declared the camp a restricted area, allegedly for security reasons. One-fourth of the camp's population has fled into the forest or to urban areas; those who remain told Refcoord they live in fear of continued police brutality, or, in some cases, retribution from other refugees for non-participation in protests. The GOG tried to prevent Emboffs from entering Krisan camp. Police detained Emboffs and threatened to confiscate their film. This incident and the findings from RefCoord's visit suggest very worrisome human rights abuses. End Summary.

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Background

[1](#)2. (SBU) Krisan camp was founded in 1996 as a safehaven for high need refugees. Krisan refugees are given full food rations and free medical care in an environment far removed from the more self-sustaining regimen of Budumburam Camp, just west of Accra. Although the intent was good, the camp's isolation in Ghana's southwestern corner has meant that Krisan's residents actually received less attention and had fewer opportunities for education, income-generating activities, or sophisticated medical care than their less needy counterparts in Budumburam. A small camp which has never housed more than 2,000 refugees, Krisan includes a mix of Togolese, Sierra Leoneans, Liberians, Congolese, Ivoirians, and Sudanese.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Conditions at the camp are far from dire, but boredom and frustration over the slow pace of resettlement have begun to take their toll. Krisan refugees believe UNHCR is no longer concerned about them. Refugees complain, for example, that the bore hole that once supplied drinking water to the camp has been broken down for months, but UNHCR has run out of money for repairs. UNHCR has not disabused the Sudanese of the notion that they will be resettled to a third country in January, as "promised" by the Minister of the Interior, raising false hopes and angering the Togolese who have lived in refugee camps since 1993 without concrete steps from UNHCR to resettle them. Others have complained to Refcoord of scorpions and snakes within the camp and of the lack of educational opportunities beyond junior secondary school. For reasons that remain unclear, the Ghanaian camp manager hired by UNHCR is held in very low esteem. According to refugees and one local press report, a visiting UNHCR employee recently told refugees, "If you are unhappy with conditions in the camp, you are free to leave."

[1](#)4. (U) As reported Ref B, refugees began to do precisely that in early November, congregating at the Ivoirian border 55 kilometers away and requesting admittance to Cote d'Ivoire, where some may have thought conditions for refugees would be better. Police arrived on the scene on November 7, giving the crowd 24 hours to disperse.

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The Violence Begins

[1](#)5. (C) Police returned to the border on November 8, herding the unwilling refugees who remained onto buses. According to refugees and UNHCR, the police began beating many of the refugees, including some French speakers who were simply confused. Ghana's Inspector General of Police confirmed the police beatings to PolChief on December 13, saying that the Minister of Interior "handled the situation badly" and ordered outnumbered police at the border to repel the refugees. Refugees allege that the beatings continued en route to Krisan. Refugees were returned to the camp by 9 a.m., by which time other refugees had set fire to the warehouse, the UNHCR office, and one vehicle. Most of the

perpetrators were Togolese, according to UNHCR, but a few Ivoirians and Liberians also took part in the melee. Police withdrew from the camp until 2 p.m., when they returned in greater numbers. According to refugees in the camp, police went from house to house, indiscriminately beating all residents, including the Sudanese and other innocents who had not participated in the border protest nor the arson. Senior UNHCR Protection Officer Jane Muigai asserted to Refcoord that the organizers of the border protest and the arsonists had fled the camp.

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Justice Marches Forward  
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16. (SBU) Muigai told Ref Coord that Ghanaian authorities were seeking the arrest of 40 individuals, of whom 11 have already been jailed, released on bail, and scheduled for another court appearance on December 14. Some of those being sought have reportedly fled to Accra, where they lead a shadowy existence on the streets in an attempt to evade justice. She thought that those who organized the border protest would be fined, but that arsonists would probably be sent to prison. Muigai added that a camp registration exercise on December 2 indicated that Krisan's population had declined by one-fourth to 1,350; she thought the missing refugees were either hiding in the forest or residing in Takoradi or Accra. She noted the deterioration in relations with neighboring Ghanaian villagers, most of whom are poor and envious of the spurned opportunities given to refugees.

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Emboffs Visit the Camp  
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17. (C) In the first diplomatic visit to the camp since the violence started, Ref Coords from Accra and Abidjan entered Krisan on December 8, along with Richard Kaminski, the visiting Desk Officer for Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana. Prior to their departure, the Chief Director of the Ministry of Interior told RefCoord that the camp was safe to visit and asked for a courtesy letter informing him of the visit plans. However, early in the morning of December 8, he called to say that procedures had changed, that the visit was not yet authorized, and that the Minister of the Interior needed to approve all visitors to the camp. The Minister told PolChief later that morning that Refcoords should not visit the camp because of security concerns, saying he would consider a later visit if Refcoord were accompanied by personnel from the Ghana Refugee Board. By that time, Ref Coords were nearly at the camp's gate and unreachable by cell phone. They did not know of the Minister's last-minute decision to bar their entry.

18. (C) The dozen policemen guarding the camp readily allowed Refcoords and Desk Officer to enter Krisan, in what we later realized contradicted their orders from Accra. Refugees were eager to share their experiences, describing wholesale violence and thefts from November 8 - 11, including mass beatings and arrests carried out stealthily in the middle of the night. One woman said she had been stripped; others displayed their broken teeth. Muslims complained that the Ghanaian policemen had defiled the camp mosque when they rushed inside without removing their shoes. Over a dozen refugees partially removed their clothing to reveal evidence of police brutality -- arms in slings, scarring on the legs and back, wounds to the forehead. Yet Refcoords saw a UNHCR announcement in the camp dated November 11 that stated "follow up at the Ekwe referral hospital did not reveal any wounded refugees." The camp clinic's own records indicated that 100 refugees were treated there for injuries following the events of November 8; refugees claimed they were denied further treatment at Ekwe. The head nurse (protect) added that one of his patients had been dragged out of the clinic and beaten while undergoing treatment for previous injuries. UNHCR alleges that the police later apologized for their excesses, but refugees said they had no such recollection of an apology.

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Refugee Complaints  
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19. (SBU) Ref Coords asked refugees why some refugees had torched the warehouse sheltering implements for making manioc paste and palm oil, together with a number of new sewing machines, all designed to help the refugees become more self-sufficient. While not justifying the arsonists, refugees explained that the self-help program had been "imposed" on them with no dialogue; though the intention was good, they wondered who, among their poor Ghanaian neighbors, would have the cash to buy clothes, palm oil, or manioc paste from them. Some believed rumors that participation in the income-generating project would disqualify them for resettlement. Those refugees with professional, urban backgrounds frowned upon any work associated with agriculture or manual labor. Other refugees said they were unable to

gain employment with certificates they had earned as hairdressers or tailors. Refugees wondered why UNHCR had not initiated a micro-credit program for starting up small businesses, such as has occurred at Budumburam and in some refugee camps in Guinea.

110. (SBU) Many refugees complained of untreated medical conditions. One man had suffered continuous pain from kidney stones since 2004 but had only been given prescription medicine. Another child had a hernia and presumably needed an operation. One woman said while visiting the UNHCR office in Accra, she collapsed and was then referred to a mental hospital. Our impression was that the Krisan clinic staff was dedicated, compassionate, and professional; moreover, the head nurse said there was no lack of medicine. It is possible that the referral system to local hospitals has broken down, despite claims to the contrary by the National Catholic Secretariat (NCS), which manages health care at Krisan. One refugee claimed he had been refused treatment in Takoradi despite having a broken arm; the same man said he had spent eight days in jail without food.

111. (C) When asked what refugees fear most, the majority said the Ghanaian police. (Refugees meeting separately with UNHCR in Accra reported their greatest fear was retribution from the more radical refugees in the camp.) NCS confirmed that two Togolese families had fled to Takoradi and Accra because they did not participate in any protests and feared reprisals. During our visit only the Sudanese openly spoke of fearing both the police and other refugees. Ref Coords advised refugees to remain calm, to continue their dialogue with UNHCR, and to submit to the Ghanaian judicial system if summoned.

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Police Detain Emboffs  
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112. (SBU) After Emboffs mingled freely among the refugees and took photos for two hours, a squadron of police arrived with automatic weapons, their leader shouting belligerently, "You have no permission to be here!" We later learned they had received orders from Accra to escort Emboffs out of the camp and take them to the Regional Superintendent of Police in Sekondi, where, ironically, Ref Coord had already booked an afternoon appointment with Commander Arthur. Armed policemen boarded the two Embassy vehicles and rode with them to Sekondi. Arthur was calm and courteous and Emboffs apologized profusely for any misunderstanding. Arthur said he wanted to confiscate our film, but Emboffs resisted. After a series of phone calls to Accra, Arthur said we were free to go, explaining that we had not been "detained," only "delayed." DCM subsequently apologized to the Chief Director of the Ministry of Interior (who was furious) but also protested the treatment of our officers.

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Comment  
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113. (C) The Minister of Interior told PolChief the newspaper stories about police abuses in Krisan were "inaccurate" and claimed some of our refugee sources in Accra are "ringleaders" from Krisan, wanted by the police. While some refugees who talked to us may have agendas to peddle, Refcoord's findings at the camp are consistent with reports from Krisan refugees who have sought him out in Accra as well as with reports in The Chronicle newspaper. The Inspector General of Police conceded that the reports of police abuses in Krisan could be true, although he said he would need to check into them because he had just returned from travels. UNHCR believes there have been some police abuses in the camp but they did not visit the camp until several weeks after the violence and do not have independent information.

114. (C) The visit to Krisan raises serious concerns. The new restrictions on visits to Krisan Camp (unprecedented in our recent experience), the hour-long detention of three U.S. diplomats, and the threat to confiscate our film suggest a cover-up and a hyper-sensitivity to anything that would cast a shadow on Ghana's international credentials. According to the December 12 issue of The Chronicle, police removed one of their journalists as well as two Journalists for Human Rights volunteers from the camp the same day they removed Emboffs. Police also reportedly detained a German man heading a local NGO who was taking photos from a public road outside the entrance to Krisan camp. The Ambassador has sought a meeting with the Minister of Interior on December 16 to raise our concerns about Krisan.

115. (C) While the human rights situation in Ghana is generally good, the country has a history of police abuses, including responding to civil unrest with beatings and excessive force. The Krisan incident underscores the need for more human rights training for the police. The Krisan experience also points to some concerns about UNHCR and

refugees in Ghana. UNHCR has long been hampered by erratic funding, staffing gaps, and a reticence to refer cases for resettlement -- even after refugees have spent ten years without another durable solution in sight. Their apparently poor handling of Krisan camp may have contributed to the recent violence. Many Ghanaians are unhappy about hosting so many refugees, especially given the recent influx of Togolese and a fracas involving Sudanese in Accra. The Chief Director of Interior recently told PolChief (before the Krisan visit) "we need to discuss refugees soon." The Acting Commissioner of the Commission on Human Rights noted Ghanaian fatigue with refugees in a Human Rights Day speech at the Ambassador's residence on December 9. Criticism of human rights abuses in Krisan, however justified, could further erode the GOG's patience as a host of refugees.

16. (U) This telegram was cleared by Nick Hilgert, Refcoord in Abidjan, prior to transmission.

BRIDGEWATER

BRIDGEWATER